



SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

THIS MONTH, THE TEXAS ATTORNEY General's Office, law enforcement officials and crime victim advocacy groups throughout the country will observe Sexual Assault Awareness Month. The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) has long been committed to preventing sexual violence and serving crime victims through quality assistance to Texas victims and survivors. In addition to offering funding and technical assistance to sexual assault programs throughout the State, our Sexual Assault Prevention and Crisis Services (SAPCS) Program certifies Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs).

For sexual assault survivors, a SANE nurse's role is often the epitome of patient support. SANEs are registered nurses who have been specifically trained to provide comprehensive care to sexual assault survivors during a medical forensic examination. SANEs, as health care professionals, offer not only medical care, but also provide critical assistance to law enforcement by collecting and preserving forensic evidence that prosecutors may need to hold perpetrators accountable for their sexual assault-related crimes.

To become an OAG-certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, SAPCSP requires a registered nurse to complete classroom and clinical training components.

SANE programs help sexual assault survivors by ensuring that a victim receives appropriate medical treatment – while at the same time ensuring that forensic evidence is properly collected. Crime victim advocacy groups note that survivors recover more quickly when they have been properly treated by a professional sexual assault nurse examiner.

Additionally, a sexual assault victim who has received compassionate treatment from the same SANE throughout the exam is more likely to help authorities pursue the perpetrator. Adult sexual assault victims decide for themselves whether to report the crime to law enforcement authorities. SANEs are trained to provide effective courtroom testimony if a victim chooses to report the crime and press legal charges against the attacker.

Importantly, sexual assault victims are not charged for the forensic portion of the sexual assault medical forensic examination. The forensic

examination, including the evidence collection kit, is initially paid for by the local law enforcement agency. Local law enforcement agencies are then reimbursed by the OAG's Texas Compensation for Victims of Crime (CVC) Fund. The CVC Fund is also available as a payer of last resort to reimburse victims for other expenses incurred because of the crime – such as treatment of physical injuries, counseling or even relocation for sexual assault victims attacked in their own residence.

Nurse professionals who obtain SANE certification learn how to properly collect valuable forensic evidence. As a result, SANEs have the ability to help improve sexual assault survivors' mental health and physical well being – while also helping law enforcement authorities investigate and prosecutors secure convictions of sex offenders. Accurate evidence collection and increased conviction rates can help ensure that more sexual assault perpetrators in Texas are incarcerated and safely prevented from harming new victims.

– April 2011

POINTS TO REMEMBER



SEXUAL ASSAULT NURSE EXAMINERS (SANE)

SANEs are registered nurses who have been specifically trained to provide comprehensive care to sexual assault survivors and to collect and preserve sexual assault forensic evidence. Responsibilities of a SANE nurse include:

- Performing a comprehensive medical examination of the victim
- Providing medical and nursing treatment as indicated by the individual victim's needs
- Supporting the victim's psychological needs
- Collecting evidence
- Providing appropriate medical and counseling referrals
- Working closely with law enforcement and prosecutors
- Providing expert courtroom testimony about the forensic evidence collected

For more information about the Office of the Attorney General's SANE certification program, contact:

Sexual Assault Prevention & Crisis Services Program

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